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Arms Control: The First Round in Geneva



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Following is an address by Paul H. Nitze, Special Adviser to the President and the Secretary of State on Arms Control Matters, before the National Press Club, Washington, D.C., May 1, 1985.

On April 23, U.S. and Soviet negotiators completed their first round of talks on nuclear and space arms in Geneva. On that same day, in his speech at the Central Committee plenum, Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev criticized the United States for blocking progress in the negotiations. He alleged that we had refused to discuss the question of preventing an arms race in space. He charged us with violating the agreement reached in January by Secretary Shultz and Foreign Minister Gromyko to address the complex of issues in their interrelationship. Finally, he extolled the moratorium proposal introduced by the Soviets in the first round as providing a basis for progress.

Mr. Gorbachev's claims are without merit. The U.S. approach to the negotiations is specifically designed to pursue all of the agreed objectives of the talks, including preventing an arms race in space. It is the Soviets who, by focusing their energies on an attempt to derail SDI [Strategic Defense Initiative] research, are contradicting the January agreement to deal with all the issues in their interrelationship. The Soviet moratorium proposal does not provide a useful basis for progress. And it is the Soviet approach as a whole that is blocking U.S. efforts to facilitate movement in the negotiations.

Let me review the results of the first round and explain the basis for these conclusions.

Background

As you remember, the Shultz-Gromyko agreement in January established the parameters of the negotiations. They agreed that the subject is the complex of questions concerning space and nuclear arms—both strategic and intermediate range—to be considered and resolved in their interrelationship. The agreed objective is to seek effective agreements aimed at reducing strategic and intermediate-range nuclear arsenals, at strengthening strategic stability, and at preventing an arms race in space. The detailed work of the talks is being conducted in three negotiating groups addressing strategic nuclear arms, intermediate-range nuclear forces, and defense and space arms.

U.S. Approach

The United States approached the first round of the negotiations with four primary objectives in mind.

1. • The first of these is to seek equitable and verifiable agreements leading to deep reductions in offensive nuclear arsenals. These are the weapons that exist today and which, thus, pose the most immediate threat to our mutual security.

2. • Our second goal is to resolve our concerns about the erosion of the ABM [Anti-ballistic Missile] Treaty regime that has resulted from Soviet actions over the past decade and about Soviet noncompliance with that and other existing agreements. We are determined to seek corrective action where violations have occurred.

3. • Our third objective is to lay out the U.S. strategic concept and engage the Soviets in a general discussion of the offense-defense relationship. Specifically, we want to explain how, over the long term—should new defensive technologies prove feasible—we hope to make a transition from the current situation, in which deterrence rests on the ultimate threat of devastating nuclear retaliation, to one in which nuclear arms are greatly reduced and increasing reliance is placed on defenses which threaten no one. We intend, when the Soviets are ready to join us in doing so, to begin discussions with them on our ideas as to how our two sides might jointly manage such a transition.

4. • Our final objective is to impress upon the Soviets that our ultimate goal, as the President has repeatedly stated, is the elimination of all nuclear weapons. The Soviet Union has long stated this to be its goal as well. We have no illusions that our two sides can quickly or easily agree on the practical steps necessary to reach this goal, but its importance makes it imperative that we persist. Were nuclear weapons to be eliminated, we would have to devote particular attention to how, together with our allies, we might counter and diminish the threat posed by conventional arms imbalances, through both arms improvements and arms control efforts.

At the beginning of the round, in meetings of the full delegations, the U.S. negotiators presented our assessment of the current strategic situation and our ideas on how we could pursue the agreed objectives of the talks. After 2 weeks, the delegations broke into the

separate negotiating groups, and the detailed work began.

In the negotiating group on strategic offensive arms, the United States laid out its conceptual approach to achieving significant, equitable, and verifiable reductions in a manner that would improve stability. This approach includes substantial reductions in the number of warheads on, and the destructive capacity of, ballistic missiles, as well as limits on heavy bombers and the number of ALCMs [air-launched cruise missiles] they carry, below the levels set by SALT II [strategic arms limitation talks]. U.S. negotiators emphasized the broad authority they had been given by the President for working out means to reach that goal. They made it clear that it is the substantive outcome, more than the method of achieving it, that is of primary importance.

The U.S. side also stressed that the United States is not trying to dictate the character of the Soviet force structure. We recognize that there are substantial differences between our respective nuclear arsenals and have, therefore, urged the Soviets to explore with us possible tradeoffs between areas of U.S. and Soviet advantage and interest. An example of such a tradeoff would be a provision allowing a Soviet advantage in ballistic missile capability in return for a U.S. advantage in bomber capability.

In the negotiating group on intermediate-range nuclear forces, the United States reaffirmed its preference for the complete elimination of all U.S. and Soviet LRINF [longer range intermediate-range nuclear forces] missile systems. We reiterated our willingness to agree, as an interim measure, to reduce LRINF missiles to the lowest possible equal global limits on warheads. Finally, in order to take account of previously expressed Soviet concerns, we renewed our willingness to consider a commitment not to deploy in Europe all of the LRINF missiles to which we would be entitled under equal global ceilings, to apportion reductions to be made in LRINF missiles between Pershing IIs and GLCMs [ground-launched cruise missiles] in an appropriate manner, and to discuss LRINF aircraft limitations. As in the strategic arms group, the U.S. negotiators emphasized their flexibility.

In the defense and space negotiating forum, we pointed out the instability that exists in the current strategic situation and the need for our two sides to address the problem. We stressed the importance we attach to reversing the erosion of the ABM Treaty regime. In that regard, we underlined the premium we place on treaty compliance in the arms control process and our concern, about Soviet actions that violate the ABM Treaty and other existing agreements. Notable in this regard is

their construction of a large phased-array ballistic missile tracking radar at Krasnoyarsk that, because of its interior location, orientation, and early warning capability, violates ABM Treaty constraints. We also explained to the Soviets our view on the relationship between offensive and defensive forces, the potential contribution of defensive forces to our mutual security, and how—if new defensive technologies prove feasible—we might manage a stable transition, over time, toward increased reliance on defenses.

In sum, the United States carried out its planned agenda in the first round. We explained our concerns created by the existing array of nuclear arsenals and put forth sound proposals to redress those problems. We outlined our vision of a safer and more stable future and explained our ideas on how such a future could be realized.

Soviet Approach

The Soviet approach to the first round contrasted sharply with ours. Where we sought deep reductions in existing nuclear arsenals, they proposed to freeze the current situation—with its existing imbalances—and address largely unspecified reductions later. Where we sought to explain our ideas on how increased reliance on defenses, should they prove feasible, might enhance strategic stability, they insisted on banning any new effort—even research—in the defense area.

The strategy underlying the Soviet approach seems clear. The Soviet Union is pleased with the current strategic situation. They possess substantial advantages in several key measures of strategic offensive nuclear power, especially in prompt counterforce capability. They hold a large advantage in the area of intermediate-range nuclear forces, particularly in longer range INF missile systems. Moreover, they have the only operational ABM system and have, until recently, enjoyed a virtual monopoly in research into advanced ballistic missile defense technologies. Finally, they have the only operational antisatellite system. They want to maintain this situation and, thus, are devoting their efforts to countering any change.

Their most important objective in this regard is to stop the U.S. SDI research program, which threatens to find counters which would negate many of their advantages, both offensive and defensive. Similarly, they wish to abort our strategic modernization program and roll back NATO's INF deployments. To this end, they attack and, thereby, seek to undermine support for these programs by characterizing them as exacerbating the "arms race," all the while re-

maining silent on the strategic buildup of the Soviet Union.

The centerpiece, thus far, of the Soviet strategy is their moratorium proposal, tabled early in the round in Geneva and publicized 3 weeks later by General Secretary Gorbachev.

With regard to offensive weapons, the Soviets propose a quantitative freeze on strategic arms and a moratorium on further deployments of "medium-range" missiles. These are the same old discredited proposals the Soviets surfaced in the past. They first raised a moratorium over 3 years ago in the INF negotiations, although, after supposedly invoking it on a unilateral basis in 1982, they continued construction of SS-20 bases already begun in the European U.S.S.R. and deployed new missiles at those bases. Interestingly enough, we see construction of SS-20 bases continuing again today, after Mr. Gorbachev's declaration of a new unilateral moratorium.

The Soviets subsequently proposed a moratorium in START [strategic arms reduction talks]. As we noted on those occasions, a moratorium would lock in the advantages the Soviets have gained in both strategic and intermediate-range nuclear arms as a result of their deployment of many modern systems during a period in which the United States has exercised restraint. Negotiating it would divert considerable time and attention from the more important goal of achieving deep reductions and would also directly undercut the prospects for achieving reductions, instead giving the Soviets incentives to preserve their advantages by perpetuating the freeze.

With respect to strategic defense, the Soviets propose a comprehensive ban on research and development, as well as on testing and deployment, of what they call "space-strike arms."

It is difficult to see how one could effectively or verifiably ban research. The Soviets have, in the past, agreed with this view, not only at the time of the negotiation of the ABM Treaty but also in January in Geneva.

How could one decide what research would lead to "space-strike arms" and, thus, cross over the line into the restricted category, and what research would not? It would be impossible to monitor the actions and thoughts of all the scientists and technicians in the research institutes and laboratories in every country of both alliances.

Moreover, SDI research holds open the one possibility of providing the means for a move to a more defense-reliant relationship, one that would be more stable and reliable for both sides. It makes no sense to foreclose such a possibility. Furthermore, such research is a powerful deterrent to a Soviet breakout from the ABM Treaty.

The Soviets themselves have clearly seen the value of researching new defensive technologies. They have devoted considerable time and resources to such an effort. This includes high-energy lasers—for example, at the Sary Shagan test center—and particle-beam weapons.

Why, then, do the Soviets propose to ban such research? The answer is simple. The Soviets are ahead in research on and deployment potential for nuclear-armed, ground-based ABM interceptors, and they seek to preserve and enhance these advantages. At the same time, the Soviets fear that the West's superior technological base could give us an advantage in the more exotic defensive technologies, and they want to prevent this. At worst, a mutually observed ban would leave them where they are today. Moreover, given the unverifiability of a research ban and the closed nature of their scientific community compared to ours, they very well might be able unilaterally to continue research on advanced defensive systems on a clandestine basis. From Moscow's point of view, such a monopoly in the area of strategic defense research would certainly be the most desirable outcome.

As for development, testing, and deployment of so-called space-strike arms, most of this is already covered by provisions of existing treaties. The Outer Space Treaty prohibits the placing of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, in space. The Limited Test Ban Treaty forbids the testing of nuclear arms in space.

Additionally, all systems—whether nuclear or otherwise—which have a capability to counter strategic ballistic missiles or their warheads at any point in their trajectory are subject to the ABM Treaty. That agreement prohibits the deployment of ABM systems in space or on the earth, except for precisely limited, fixed, land-based systems. Its provisions also cover testing and engineering development of such systems or their major components.

It, thus, appears that the sole space activity that is not covered by existing agreements is that of a narrow class of antisatellite—or ASAT—systems. This class is restricted to non-nuclear systems capable of attacking satellites but not capable of countering strategic ballistic missiles or strategic ballistic missile warheads. Were they capable of the latter, they would be subject to terms of the ABM Treaty.

In essence, we are talking about the Soviet co-orbital interceptor—the world's only operational ASAT system—and the aircraft-launched miniature vehicle system now under development by the United States.

Banning ASAT-capable systems presents difficulties. Once an ASAT weapon, such as the Soviet co-orbital

ASAT, has reached operational status, it is questionable that one could assure that all such systems had been destroyed. Even were we to find a way to ban the declared U.S. and Soviet ASAT systems, most satellites would still be vulnerable to attack, especially by nuclear weapons. The existing Soviet Galosh ABM interceptors deployed around Moscow are capable of attacking low-orbiting satellites, which pose much easier targets than do ballistic missile warheads. In fact, any ballistic missile capable of lofting a nuclear weapon to orbital altitudes has some inherent ASAT capability.

Thus, we concluded, after carefully studying the Soviet moratorium proposal in the aftermath of its presentation in Geneva, that it does not provide a useful basis for progress in the Geneva talks.

Soviet Allegations

In an attempt to buttress their position, the Soviets, during the first round, and Mr. Gorbachev, in his Central Committee plenum speech, accused us of violating the Shultz-Gromyko agreement in two respects. First, they charged us with failing to honor the commitment to address the complex of space and nuclear issues in their interrelationship, based on their novel definition of that term. The Soviets asserted that progress on the issues in the two groups dealing with offensive arms would be impossible unless the United States agreed to the Soviet proposal to ban "space-strike arms" and that, by failing to accept that ban, the United States was denying the interrelationship.

This charge is, of course, without merit. The United States is addressing all issues in their interrelationship. In fact, as I explained earlier, the offense-defense relationship is one of the principal elements on which our position focuses. Rather, it is the Soviet approach which violates the interrelationship agreement by insisting that the space issue be considered in isolation and by setting resolution of that issue—on the basis of their demands—as a precondition to serious negotiation on the other issues.

The second Soviet charge is that, by failing to agree to their proposal for a "space-strike arms" ban, the United States is reneging on its commitment to prevent an arms race in space. This charge is also groundless; preventing an arms race in space is exactly what our strategic concept envisages. The term "arms race" connotes a runaway competition between two sides, with each piling weapon upon weapon in an unbridled manner. What we propose is just the opposite—a stable transition to greater reliance on defensive systems, should new technologies prove feasible, managed jointly by the United States

and the Soviet Union. Defenses would be introduced at a measured pace, in conjunction with progressively stricter limitations and reductions in offensive nuclear arms. The result would be that the two sides would have far fewer weapons which would use space as a medium for delivering nuclear destruction. The approach we foresee would be designed to maintain at all times control over the mix of offensive and defensive systems on both sides and, thereby, increase the confidence of the sides in the effectiveness and stability of the deterrent balance.

Steps Backward

Beyond pressing these baseless charges, pushing their moratorium proposal, and showing little interest in exploring U.S. proposals, the Soviets provided little of substance and few specifics during the round. Of the specifics that were offered, many represent steps backward from previous Soviet positions.

For example, in the START negotiations in 1983, the Soviets expressed willingness to consider permitting some deployment of air-launched cruise missiles. Their current position calls for a ban on all cruise missiles with range exceeding 600 kilometers, regardless of basing mode.

In the INF talks in 1983, the Soviets offered a freeze on SS-20 deployments in Asia; now they insist on having no constraints on these systems, which, due to their range and mobility, are capable of striking Europe in addition to threatening U.S. friends and allies in Asia. Similarly, in 1983, the Soviets showed considerable flexibility regarding the U.S. aircraft on which they would require limits; now they have returned to their earlier and far more strident demands.

In the January meeting in Geneva, Gromyko acknowledged that limits on strategic defense research would not be verifiable; the Soviets, nonetheless, now propose banning such research.

Also in the January meeting, Gromyko included the Moscow ABM system in the Soviet definition of "space-strike arms"; at the negotiating table, the Soviets specifically excluded that system from their definition and, thus, from their proposed ban.

Finally, in the antisatellite talks of 1978-79, the Soviets acknowledged that neither limits on ASAT research nor a comprehensive ASAT ban would be verifiable; in Geneva, they called for a ban on such research and for a total ASAT ban—again, despite the lack of verifiability.

In sum, the Soviets took a predictably hard line in the first round. Their principal objectives were clearly to discredit the U.S. SDI research program

and to put maximum pressure on it by holding progress in all other aspects of the negotiations hostage to U.S. acceptance of the Soviet proposal on "space-strike arms."

Gorbachev's Warsaw Speech

In his speech last Friday in Warsaw, Mr. Gorbachev stated that the Soviet Union has "already suggested that both sides reduce strategic offensive arms by one-quarter by way of an opening move." He also held out the possibility of deeper mutual cuts.

Mr. Gorbachev was apparently referring to the Soviet proposal in the START negotiations of 1982-83. That proposal would have reduced strategic nuclear delivery vehicles by one-quarter from the initial level permitted under SALT II—from 2,400 to 1,800. However, the Soviets did not accompany it with a proposal for reductions in those measures of strategic capability which would, in fact, enhance strategic stability—the number of ballistic missile warheads and ballistic missile destructive capacity.

Contrary to the public impression created by Mr. Gorbachev, the Soviet Union has made no proposal for reductions in strategic forces in the new negotiations, nor has it even gone so far as to resubmit its old START proposal. In fact, during the first round, the Soviets refused to respond to efforts by U.S. negotiators to ascertain details of their position on this subject.

We would, of course, welcome and examine seriously any concrete Soviet

proposals for substantial, balanced, and stabilizing reductions in strategic forces. As I said earlier, U.S. negotiators have broad authority to negotiate approaches that meet the interests and concerns of both sides. We encourage the Soviet Union to substantiate Mr. Gorbachev's claim by introducing a proposal in the next round at Geneva.

Future Prospects

The Soviet behavior in the first round was consistent with their historical approach to arms control negotiations. That strategy is to combine tough bargaining at the negotiating table with a hard-nosed public propaganda campaign designed to undercut support for U.S. and NATO positions and force unilateral concessions. Until they realize that their propaganda campaign is not working—that is, that U.S. concessions will not be made unilaterally—the Soviets will not be prepared to negotiate seriously.

Accordingly, in the near term, we can expect the Soviets to continue to protest publicly about the SDI program and alleged U.S. designs to accelerate the arms race, especially by spreading it into space. We can also expect them to sustain their efforts to drive a wedge between the United States and its allies, particularly by exploiting any perceived signs of weakening in allied unity on defense or arms control issues.

What we in the West must do to bring the Soviets to a more serious tack

is, in parallel with our efforts at the negotiating table in Geneva, to demonstrate the political will and ability to maintain the necessary capabilities effectively to deter them. When the Soviets recognize that they will attain no exploitable military or political advantages from their military buildup and that unilateral concessions will not be forthcoming, they may then welcome a serious discussion of how we could take practical steps toward our agreed objectives of preventing an arms race in space and terminating it on earth, limiting and reducing nuclear arms, and strengthening strategic stability.

When the Soviets are ready for such discussions, we believe those talks can be productive. Although the issues in Geneva are many and complex, we are convinced that we have formulated good proposals that provide a sound basis for mutually beneficial agreements. Moreover, the President has provided our negotiators unprecedented flexibility to explore various avenues toward the equitable outcomes we seek. Accordingly, despite our realization of the difficulties ahead, we are hopeful that, with patience and persistence, we can achieve a result that will benefit all mankind. ■

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